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ABSTRACT

In 1988 a paper described "Start-Up Strategies for Speaking and Listening across Disciplines," with special reference to eight institutions which at that time had relatively freshly-minted programs in speaking across the curriculum (Weiss). Eight strategies for starting such programs were delineated and remain viable today, but the shelf-life of speaking across the curriculum programs has turned out to be rather short since at least half of those described in 1988 are no longer in operation. What happens to these programs that diminishes them and in many cases interferes with their being sustained? The eight institutions which implemented programs were Clarkson University, Ithaca College, Pima Community College, St. Mary-of-the-Woods College, Central College, Hamline University, DePauw University, and Alverno College. This paper discusses each of these programs and their trajectories, along with three other programs originating during the same era, those of the Borough of Manhattan Community College, Bismarck State College, and Radford University. Although every one of the programs examined has had some productive and positive aspects, the paper's concern is with the hazards they faced in sustaining themselves. It points to financial exigencies, leader dependence, insufficient institutionalization, and academic ideologies as some of the problems leading to the discontinuation of these programs. (Contains 10 references.) (NKA)

SUSTAINING SPEAKING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM PROGRAMS

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SUSTAINING SPEAKING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM PROGRAMS

A paper presented at the Speech Communication Association meeting 10 years ago described "Start-Up Strategies for Speaking and Listening Across Disciplines," with special reference to eight institutions which at that time had relatively freshly minted programs in speaking across the curriculum (Weiss, 1988). Eight strategies for starting such programs were delineated, and indeed these suggestions remain viable for new programs today. However, the shelf-life of speaking across the curriculum programs has turned out to be rather short, and at least half of those described in 1988 are no longer in operation. Thus arises the question of how speaking and listening across the curriculum programs may be sustained.

Our approach in the present investigation will be a manifestly negative one. The question we are asking is what happens to these programs that diminishes them and in many cases interferes with their being sustained at all.

Eight Institutions

Clarkson University was one of the eight institutions discussed in the 1988 survey. Clarkson under the leadership of Thomas Steinfatt had an approach well-known because it was described in an article in *Communication Quarterly* and was unique for its development of "communication modules" as the foundation for its across the curriculum approach. This program expired within a few years, and Steinfatt (1998) comments:

Any program in any organization is usually explainable by looking at the level that the person responsible for the program reports to. In my case that was the Dean of the Management School. When he stepped aside, CAC was not high on the agenda of his replacement and the program died.

The program continued briefly with another director after Steinfatt left the institution, but ended about three years later.

Ithaca College, operating with a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education, experimented with an innovative approach that tried to integrate speaking, as well as writing and critical thinking, into disciplinary courses for first-year students. The rationale was published in an article in the *Journal of Developmental and Remedial Education* (Erich and Kennedy, 1982). This program was short-lived, however, once the experimental stage was over, and Dean Howard Erlich (1998) says in blunt terms, "I ascribe its demise principally to "ownership." In further explanation, Erlich adds,

Like most colleges and universities, my school is strongly departmentally based, and I'm sorry to say that departmental concern for, much less ownership of, other than discipline-specific curricula or concerns, has always been tenuous.

He further adds, however, that "although that particular concept proved administratively burdensome (and expensive)," certain features "do live on" in the form of a First Year Seminar Program that is supposed to incorporate communication skills.

The WAC-SAC project at Pima Community College (East Campus) in Houston, Texas, went through several interesting stages. Originally a WAC Advisory Committee was established which decided to add a SAC component because of the "practical importance" of oral communication skills. Then with the support of a substantial grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education, the WAC-SAC project was expanded into a multi-school arrangement including five feeder high schools as well as all three Pima campuses. One feature of the project at this stage was the publication of a superb *Speaking Across the Curriculum Project Guide Book with Sample Assignments* by Cathy Currier and Christy Friske.

According to Project Director Stanley Witt,

The strategy paid off in improved attitudes and revised course syllabi as, for the next three years, the local secondary and postsecondary educational community imbibed massive doses of WAC and SAC.

Then, in a further transformation of the program, adaptation was made to the observation that student writing and speaking were too much directed toward the academic setting, so the program was changed into a Community Communication Corps in which persons from the business world volunteered to give real life writing and speaking assistance to the students. Project evaluations confirmed its beneficial effects. However, in 1992 came the bad news of budget restraints and the Community Communication Corps eventually was canceled due to those.

At St. Mary-of-the-Woods College, the speaking across the curriculum program was never really institutionalized. With a grant from the Exxon College Foundation, the college brought in outside consultants and trained faculty members to "instruct speech emphasis courses within their disciplines." A review of the full situation, however, resulted in the commendable conclusion that institutional objectives would be best met through increasing the required speech course from two to three semester hours. Then last year a task force was formed to revise the General Education Curriculum (funded by the Lilly Endowment) and the across-the-curriculum approach is again being considered. Janice Dukes (1998) further reports that "though many of the original faculty participants have left, those who remain are strong advocates and still use techniques they learned in the SAC program."

Speaking across the curriculum at Central College was an elaborate pioneer program that grew up in conjunction with writing across the curriculum. Operating under the aegis of a Skills

Committee, the Central program trained faculty members in many disciplines, established a skills laboratory for student assistance, and monitored student achievement throughout their college careers. The latter innovation called for reports on student participation from throughout the college, using a form developed for the purpose. An exceptionally diplomatic move was to leave certification in the hands of the academic departments. Each department set up standards applicable to their majors and departmental endorsements remain a requirement for graduation. An energetic proponent of the Central program was Charles Roberts, and this program became substantially diminished after his departure and several of the above features simply disappeared. However, the departmental standards remain in place and are revised from time to time, and Central Foundation courses have been developed at the freshman level with special emphasis on communication skills.

A model program at Hamline University culminates in a requirement that each student enroll in at least two speaking and listening intensive courses. The program was phased in along with similar analogous programs in writing, computers, and freshman seminar. In developing the initiative, a Curriculum Task Force attended divisional meetings, planned a faculty retreat, and brought proposals to the faculty floor. Patricia Palmerton, Oral Communication administrator, has emphasized the Hamline philosophy that communication is a mode of learning and that faculty involvement is vital in its planning. Hamline has now reached a transition point, where the extent of the university's financial commitment will be tested and, with the resignation of Dr. Palmerton from the directorship, whether new leadership will emerge.

At DePauw University the Oral Communication Competence Program, originally supported by the Lilly Endowment, has sustained itself for more than 15 years. This program

now also in transition faces potential diminution of support, possible ennui, and the introduction of new leadership. The distinctive feature has been a requirement that students must be certified competent in oral communication in courses taught by faculty members who have been trained to do so. The program includes an active Speaking and Listening Center, and an encouraging sign is that the directorship of that center has been recently made into a full-time position. Faculty development workshops still fill to capacity and are fully supported by the administration.

Alverno College has a nationally known and distinctive outcomes-based curriculum, following the objectives of the speaking across the curriculum philosophy of institutional responsibility for excellence in designated areas, but not having that institutionalized in the typical manner of speaking intensive courses designated specifically. One highlight of Alverno's approach is their willingness to adapt and change in efforts to develop and improve their program. In this total approach, oral communication is not spotlighted, but seems in little danger of being summarily phased out.

Three Other Programs

Three other speaking across the curriculum programs originating during the same era have followed significant trajectories.

The Borough of Manhattan Community College, supported initially by a Title III Grant from the U.S. Department of Education, set up an impressive Speaking and Listening Across the Disciplines program, with a basic intent of improving retention among its population of students. The idea was to emphasize basic speaking and listening skills in developmental courses and reinforce them throughout the curriculum. A 12-member SALAD committee developed an excellent set of objectives and was given the responsibility to determine criteria for speaking

intensive courses. The committee then conducted workshops that attracted dozens of faculty members to determine how to employ speaking into their courses. Courses which met the criteria were designated with an "S." in the schedule of classes. An assessment after three years indicated substantial success in meeting the goal of retaining students for those who had taken the speech intensive courses. However, this excellent program ended abruptly. According to a message in October of 1995 from Susanna Powell, who had become chair of the SALAD Committee,

This year we have just heard that all "intensive" courses have been withdrawn, due to the financial crisis at the City University of New York, brought about by drastic budget cuts by both city and state. Previously, professors who taught "intensive" courses (not only in speech, but also reading, writing and computers) had their classes capped at 28 students. This year, those classes are back to a cap of 40 students, making speech intensive assignments impossible.

Powell indicated, however, that the SALAD Committee had not been disbanded and future workshops were planned.

The distinctive feature of developments at Bismarck State College was an emphasis upon listening, often a neglected element of speaking across the curriculum. A grant from the Bush Foundation supported "Speaking and Listening Across the Curriculum." The emphasis in workshops conducted for faculty members was upon listening, though other kinds of communication experiences were considered, and the project eventually culminated in the establishment of a Listening course in the Fine Arts and Speech Communication Department.

One of the best-known long-term speaking across the curriculum programs has been the Oral Communication Program at Radford University. Faculty members Michael Cronin and George Grice have annually presented a "short course" at the National Communication Association convention in which they introduce more speech professionals to their approach.

Communication intensive courses, though not required, have enrolled thousands of Radford students, and assiduous evaluations indicate that they felt they "learned more" from such courses. Faculty development was carried on in "retreats" conducted in beautiful surroundings at mountain resorts. The OCP laboratory not only provides practice and tutoring in oral communication, but also the opportunity to utilize interactive video instruction, self-directed tapes developed by Cronin and a unique and distinct outcome of the Radford program. Even Radford's acclaimed and manifestly effective program has run into hazards, however (Cronin). Originally it was supported by generous grants from the Commonwealth of Virginia, but by 1995 the OCP was facing "massive budget cuts." The personnel budget for 1995-96 was cut by 75%. Released time was eliminated for the Coordinator, development of additional interactive video was completely suspended, and faculty development was limited to self-directed on-campus procedures. One other hazard emerged from the fact that the programs distinctive "consultant" approach depended upon volunteer participation by Communication faculty, and this participation also became difficult to sustain. The Peer Tutoring Laboratory and speaking intensive courses were continued, however, and the OCP goes on.

APPARENT HAZARDS

Although every one of the programs examined here has had some productive and positive aspects, the present concern will be with the hazards they faced in sustaining themselves, to the point where some of them have disappeared completely. Circumstances in each case have been unique, but some hazards may be profitably delineated and classified.

Financial Exigencies. Perhaps the clearest and most striking hazards faced by such programs as speaking across the curriculum, consist of the substantial or total withdrawal of

financial support. This sort of withdrawal is frequently precipitous as well. Genuine or perceived financial exigencies, as in cases where governmental units slash institutional funds, or where expenditures are leading to deficits, constitute a too frequent scenario for the elimination of vulnerable programs.

This hazard of the sudden withdrawal of resources is compounded by the fact that the program was surviving on inadequate support in the first place. As one correspondent complained,

It's the lack of budgetary support not only for the program but for all those faculty implementing these courses. The unwillingness to have class sizes that can sustain quality. The unwillingness to consider time devoted to these activities, whether in the classroom or outside, as adding to load.

Further compounding the problem is the universal circumstance that in a time of tight resources there is a competition for funds among units of the institution, so "vultures" are on the horizon as well.

Finally, it might be noted that one of the "start-up strategies" described in the 1988 article was the "grant," intended in most cases to allow innovative approaches to be tried out. The hazard seen in a number of cases is that the program ends when the grant money expires. Some schools have not been willing to provide the money to continue even manifestly excellent programs, such as speaking across the curriculum.

Leader Dependence. The presence of an enthusiastic leader, or "zealot," was noted as a feature of the inaugural stages of many speaking across the curriculum programs. The concomitant disadvantage becomes apparent at the other end of the program's life cycle, when the enthusiast leaves, so does the program. Thus dependence on a single leader, or small band of

leaders, can be seen as another substantial hazard in sustaining these programs. In any event, as Palmerton (1998) observed, "It's important to not conceive of the 'director' position as a position for life." Transitional pathways must be developed and ready.

Furthermore, one sign of a potentially rough row ahead is dependence upon a relatively small cadre of leadership and support within the community. Inherently, speaking across the curriculum should impact teaching across the curriculum, through many faculty who are committed to the process, and the lack of widespread participation has been an invitation to trouble.

Insufficient Institutionalization. Sometimes speaking across the curriculum program come to be characterized as "add-ons," as enhancements not integrated with the total educational mission of the institution. They then are susceptible to being lopped off. Positive institutionalization may include such matters as graduation requirements that always take a good deal of effort to change, dedicated space in university buildings, regularization of faculty development activities such as workshops and released time, dedicated staff such as speech center directors, and direct lines to responsible administration offices, such as academic deans, registrars, development offices, and the like.

Strangely enough, the bureaucratic structure and power relationships so characteristic of academic administration may well provide a layer of protection against dismantlement. The lack of such protection constitutes a serious hazard to programmatic longevity.

Academic Ideologies. A more elusive hazard for both the establishment of speaking across the curriculum programs and to their long continuation seem to emerge from values and points of view embedded in faculty discourse and decision making. An example can be found in

attitudes regarding the concept of "general studies." Speaking across the curriculum (as well as other across the curriculum thrusts) is usually generated within a general studies rubric, and insofar as substantial numbers of community members denigrate general studies they do not support these programs. As Steinfatt and others have pointed out, a cause behind this attitude is the dominance of departments in the academic structure, and except in blatant cafeteria formats, departments do not find general studies to reinforce their specialties.

Although there is no inherent contradiction between speaking across the curriculum and academic specialization (quite the contrary), such programs may be rhetorically discounted as a distraction. Related to departmental specialization are the basic publish or perish value systems of some institutions, where innovations in teaching, and even teaching itself, are thinly rewarded at best.

Traces of these ideological factors may be seen in the diminished support we have observed for speaking across the curriculum programs examined here.

PRESERVING AND ADVANCING SAC PROGRAMS

It has not been our purpose to explore the positive features which have produced sustained programs of high quality. There is ample and substantial evidence that the movement is growing and that assessments have indicated real value in them. To some extent an effort to take the reverse side of the hazards encountered, such as deliberate and substantial institutionalization or efforts to create a broad support base, are worth pursuing. And almost every program has unique features that make it worth preserving in its particular institutional setting.

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